

Session 4

STUDYING FOR TRANSFORMATION

James 1:19-25

Memory Verse

But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

– JAMES 1:22, CSB




Studying for Transformation

THEOLOGICAL THEME: God's Word is full of information that we need to know, but unless we are being transformed by it we are missing the point. We are to receive the Word and then apply it to our lives as doers of the Word.

How do you know if someone really understands what you tell them? Is it when they can repeat facts back to you? Not necessarily. Anyone who has raised kids or trained someone in a new skill can testify that merely repeating facts does not equal understanding. It can be frustrating to realize that although you have given your best in teaching or instructing, your listeners are not getting the point.

Think about it this way. When you teach or tell someone something, it is hard to know if they are receiving those instructions fully, but when you observe their actions after, things become clearer. It comes down to application. Although someone may look like they are listening, unless their actions line up with what you said, did they really hear you? There are even times when people can repeat back to you the instructions given and yet, if they don't follow through with the correct behavior then there is no application and no real understanding. Unfortunately, this doesn't just apply to daily life instructions; sometimes it's the way we approach the Bible too. James addressed this issue in detail as we will study today.

 How do you feel when you know the person you're talking to is not paying attention?



How do you know if someone is really hearing you when you talk or give instructions?

Session Summary

The Word of God is full of answers and instructions for living the Christian life. Anyone who wants to live for the Lord should look to Scripture as a guideline for everything. As God's love letter to His children, it is meant to be studied, received, and applied to our lives. The ultimate goal of knowing God's Word is transformation. The more time we spend in the Word, the more we know God and the more we should become like Jesus.

1. Receive the Word (James 1:19-21)

Time studying the Bible is valuable for all believers. It is the best way to know God better because it is His written Word to us. There is no flaw in it and, as we have studied already, it is living, active, and applicable for daily living. To allow the Word to do what it's meant to in our lives, we must learn how to receive it most effectively. You have probably experienced a time when you listened to someone teach or read something but later realized you didn't retain any of the information. When that happens, that word read or spoken was not received correctly.

Receiving the Word of God is key and has been an issue for thousands of years. James wrote his book in a very practical manner to the average believer, and it speaks strongly to our subject today. In the first chapter of James, he addressed trials, temptations, and how to have a living faith. We all want to make the best use of our lives, and no one wants to waste time. So that means we are wise to dig into what James had to say about hearing and receiving the Word of God and then move into applying and doing what we have heard.

A good rule of thumb for everyone is to be quick to listen and slow to speak. One way to remember this truth is that we have two ears and one mouth. So, it stands to reason that we should listen twice as much as we speak, especially when we are talking about hearing the Word of God. James gave practical advice for believers with the challenge to be hearers of the Word who pay attention to what God says and guard what comes out of their own mouths. While this concept seems simple, it can be challenging for us to hear what we need to from the Lord and to keep a guard over our mouths at the same time.

What kinds of things make it difficult to hear God's voice?

The world is full of noise and voices that are constantly calling us to do this or that. It can be tough to find the right voice to listen to. While the world offers numerous and continual distractions, sometimes the voices that are distracting us from hearing God are the ones in our own heads. Finding quiet moments in busy days makes it tough to sit calmly and hear from the Lord. Then if we do find the time to have a conversation with God, we struggle to turn our thoughts off from our schedules and to do lists long enough to actually hear from Him. But what if Scripture was the first thing we heard each day? Before we hear from anyone else and before we have anything to say, what if we first listen to what God might have to say to us?

How can hearing from God first change the way we hear and listen to others?

Not only do we need to hear God's Word, but we need to receive it and allow it to change the way we live our lives. James listed some of the things that will have no place in our lives when we are listening to God and obeying His Word. Scripture is to be implanted into the life of a believer and not just as external truth. It has been written on our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33). That means we have the power within us, through His Word and His Spirit, to put away the works of the flesh. This is what it means to die to self-daily and live in obedience to Christ.

Application: What needs to change for you to hear and receive God's Word most effectively?

2. Be Hearers and Doers (James 1:22-25)

We are to hear God's Word and receive it. The goal is to let it sink deeply into our lives and take root so that it can live and grow. This is the concept of the Word being implanted. When you take a seed and want to see it grow and flourish in your flowerbed or yard, there are some things you do so the seed will have the best chance of surviving and growing. You must be intentional about the planting process. Think of it like preparing the ground so the seed will be received.

Once the planting has happened then the seed must be nourished so it can transform into the plant it is designed to be. A good gardener will give that seed the right amount of water and sunlight so that it can flourish. Sometimes you may even need to protect the baby seedling from harm if adverse weather approaches. People cover their flowering bushes when a late frost is coming because they know how fragile new growth can be. Whatever the situation, the lesson is the same. If you want to see growth and transformation of the seed, then implanting it into the soil is the place to start.


Once God's Word is implanted in us, our faith in Christ should move us to action. It is not just a theory or head knowledge that we seek. James made it clear that real faith will be followed by action. The genuineness of our faith will be proven by our obedience. Without being obedient, God's Word is just an inspirational idea. James said that if you call yourself a Christian and don't put the Word into practice, you are deceiving yourself.




How do we deceive ourselves if we hear the Word but don't obey it?

It is easy to say you believe something but another thing to live consistently with what you say you believe. We can talk about trusting God no matter what and be bold about what the Bible says but what happens when real life hits? When things don't go as planned or you face opposition from the world for your faith? Those are the moments that our faith either becomes real or shows us that we are deceiving ourselves. James knew this would be a challenge, and he wanted to equip believers to be solid in their faith so they could stand firm regardless of what circumstances they faced.

James used an interesting illustration to make his point. He compared hearers of the Word who don't act on the Word to a person looking in a mirror but then forgetting who he or she is. This is the same thing we do when we only observe God's words but never put them into practice. We do this when we read and talk about our faith inside the walls of the church but never engage in gospel conversations with coworkers and friends. We do this when we sing about God's grace shown to us but never extend grace to the people around us. Scripture demands and deserves a response. True believers should respond to God's Word with our actions and stop settling for just knowing more information about God. It is not about earning God's grace—that is a free gift—but when you have received new life in Him, your life will show it. Note that James said when you do this, you will be blessed.

 How would you explain the mirror analogy James used? How do we do this when we only hear God's Word but don't respond in obedience?

 Application: What do you need to be more intentional about so that you are not just hearing the Word of God but also doing it?

3. Be Transformed (Romans 12:1-2)

Once you realize the connection between hearing the Word and doing the Word, you may wonder what it looks like or even why it matters. Paul made it clear in Romans that living the Christian life is more than just knowing more. It is also more than just doing good things. People outside of a relationship with Jesus can know more information and do good things. So, what's the big deal about hearing and doing? It all comes down to the end goal and why we are studying to know more and respond with action.

Paul summed it up with the word transformation. James wrote that hearing and doing go together. When both of those happen, you begin to see you are being transformed into the likeness of Jesus. That is the goal and Paul told us how to see transformation take place.

? How do you see that hearing and doing God’s Word brings transformation? How does Romans 12:1-2 help us understand this process?

The motivation to be intentional about everything is found in verse 1. Paul said that his appeal to believers sprung from remembering or was “in view” of what God has already done for us. Our commitment to knowing Scripture and living it out like Jesus did should be based on our gratitude for all of God’s mercies to us. Think about all the ways the Lord has shown His great love for us—the forgiveness for our sins and the redeeming grace we receive because of Jesus’s on the cross. It is because of His mercy to us that we should be committed to living the way that He instructs.

? What are some of the mercies you have personally received from God?

By instructing us to consider what God has done for us and to respond by offering ourselves up as living sacrifices, Paul reinforced the hearing and doing that James wrote about. Sacrifices were typically brought alive to the altar where they then lost their life as part of the sacrifice ritual. In presenting your body as a living sacrifice the implication is that you are not only a willing sacrifice, but you are also an ongoing sacrifice. This is not a one time only offering. We are to offer ourselves daily on the altar of sacrifice so that we are living for Him and not according to our selfish desires or sin nature. This is to become a way of life for the Christ follower who wants to live in a way that pleases the Lord. It means hearing the Word and doing the Word.

When you begin to hear and do the Word, you will start seeing transformation happening in your life. That is exactly what we want to experience but it is not always easy. Transformation is a process therefore it takes time, effort, and energy. There will be obstacles that arise to slow you down or stop the transformation from taking place. You always have the choice to pursue transformation or the opposite—

conformation to the world. Sadly, many believers spend more time conforming to what the world wants than we do to what God desires for us. Conformation is easier, quicker, and gains more accolades from the world. Transformation takes intentionality and time and draws persecution more than celebration from the world. But the rewards of transformation are life changing and eternal. When you seek to be more like Jesus, your life will display proof of that. You will be living out what it means to be a hearer as well as doer of the Word. People around you will notice, and God will bless you for your obedience as you live out His good, pleasing, and acceptable will.



Application: What is the pattern of your life—conforming or transforming? What needs to change based on the passages we’ve studied today?

Conclusion

With anything God instructs us to do, the world does not like when God’s people live in obedience. It looks different and is countercultural, but that is exactly what we are commanded to do. The world doesn’t need Christians trying to be as much like the world as we can while still having Jesus as our Savior, the world needs to see people living out what they say they believe in a real, authentic, and sometimes imperfect way.

When we are being transformed into the likeness of Christ, others are encouraged in their faith and drawn to know Him more. The lost will be attracted to what we have when we live consistently with our faith and are motivated by the mercy we have received.

❓ How does a transformed life draw people to faith? How has this been attractive to you in other people?

❓ How do you need to be more intentional in making transformation your goal?

❓ Who is God calling you to have a gospel conversation with this week? How can I do what He calls me to do? To whom, as a group or as an individual, is God leading us to minister to? What does obedience look like?



FOR NEXT WEEK

Memorize

But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

- James 1:22, CSB